WHIRRAKEE

December 2013

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
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Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $40; Family $50; Concession: Single $35; Family $40. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $40.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The meeting starts with a 10 minute thing-of-the night natural history segment. The invited speaker starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper. The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 5:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Anne Bridley, Kerrie Norris, John Lindner, Jenny Shield, Diana Collier, Devi Shanty

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. Several interclub field naturalist campouts are held every year.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is actively involved in local conservation issues. An **indigenous garden** has been established around the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building. Working bees are advertised on the *Whirrakee* diary page.

Bird Observing: Club members conduct regular bird surveys. Please contact Anne Bridley 5442 6188 or Glenise Moors 5439 6254 for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5442 6188. To propose bird observing excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

Front cover photo?...see page 2

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club
Vol. 34, No. 11, December 2013
Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*), which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions should be posted or e-mailed to the editor at least two days prior to the last Wednesday of the month. They will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although space restrictions occasionally require shortening of articles or holding them over till the following edition of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note
As we finish the year, special thanks must go to our Whirrakee *contributors for 2013. John Lindner must get the first prize, with his detailed excursion and camp-out reports. I also want to express special thanks to Peter Ellis, who continuously digs up old and re-worked material and sends me copies to include in the* Whirrakee*...space permitting. Most of the time there is no space, so you haven't seen too much of Peter's efforts. Nevertheless, his contributions are also valued. Although Dale Little is a regular contributor of interesting garden observations, we are often a bit short on those sort of field-natty contributions. Please consider reporting just small snippets that you imagine our readership is interested in (and we cover a wide field of interests indeed!).*
I have been unhappy with the reproduction of photos in the last couple of edition and am now experimenting with brightness and contrast prior to printing. It is always a great shame when photos that look absolutely brilliant on my computer screen come out dull and mis-coloured on the printed pages. Please forgive any mishaps until we get this right.
Hopefully we will all meet for the December Christmas dinner gathering (don't forget the earlier starting time), but if not, have a peaceful, happy and interesting Christmas break. The general meetings resume in February, but the speaker for that meeting will remain a mystery for now.

Front page photographer: Pam Sheean
This photo shows participants in the Warby Range camp-out finishing the Pine Gully Nature Trail. More photos are on page 5 and the article is on page 8.

Email Notifications

If you wish to be advised promptly of interesting sightings, events or other special communications you can subscribe to our club's email notifications service. Subscribers to the service who make an unusual or interesting sighting in our region can email all other members of the service.

Email **subscribe** in the subject line to info@bendigofnc.com.au if you wish to join the service. Include your full name in the body of the email.

To be added to the list you must first send an email to the address provided. This is the easiest way to manage the system.

Box-Ironbark Experimental Mosaic Burning Project

Besides straight fuel-reduction burning (e.g. One-Tree Hill in late November), there are other burning projects under way. A few days ago, I received the latest newsletter (#5) providing information and updates regarding the Box-Ironbark Experimental Mosaic Burning Project. Greg Holland from Deakin University who sent the report is happy for me to forward this newsletter onto anyone interested. If that is you, please let me know and I will forward you a copy.

If you would like more information, this is Greg's e-mail address: Gregory Holland greg.holland@deakin.edu.au

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Willing to help with a new publication?

The committee is requesting expressions of interest from members who want to assist with the production of a new BFNC publication. Anybody interested can email their details and ask for more information about the project on info@bendigofnc.com.au

Bowerbird – sharing observations and networking on interesting projects

Some time ago, Richard Goonan introduced the 'Bowerbird' web site as something all members could get involved in. The site features many interesting projects to which people can contribute, or just check out for information and pleasure. Richard has set up a project for the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Community, so there is already some local information that we can share in and contribute to, but naturally members are not confined to the Bendigo project,

The 'Bowerbird' site is part of a bigger website called: *PaDIL – High quality images and information tools designed for Biosecurity and Biodiversity*. It can be accessed at: http://www.padil.gov.au/

Once there, click on the **Bowerbird** tab. You can simply join 'Bowerbird' and have a look around at all the great projects (including the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club project) but you might also find yourself contributing before long. Have a look and tell us what you think.

Opportunity to assist the Bendigo Mountain Bike Club

by Richard Goonan

Shaun Qualyle from the Bendigo Mountain Bike Club spoke at the November meeting about the construction of a mountain bike track through the forest near Spring Gully. Part of the work that the bike club is doing includes plans to close down other illegal and damaging tracks. For many years, members of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club have been concerned about the impact of illegal tracks that have appeared throughout the forest due to the rising popularity of mountain bikes. You can join the Mountain Bike Club with this practical effort to address the issue by assisting with their upcoming working day (1st February) to undertake rehabilitation activities. Please contact Shaun for any further enquiries: shaun@communityvibe.com.au

Impressions from the Warby Range excursion
Photos by Pam Sheean

Top: Turquoise Parrot at Wenham's Campsite
Below: Tiger Orchid at Wenham's campsite

Below: Willy Wagtail on nest
on nest

Below: Jacky Winter on nest

Grampians wonderland

Jan and Rod walked up Mt William on the 26th November, looking for the Rosy Bush-pea *Pultenaea subalpina*, which they found flowering close to the summit.
This plant is a Grampians endemic and grows only near the top of the highest peaks - you have to walk a fair distance from the nearest car-park - 2km up a very steep road in the case of Mt William.

During just the last 3 days of Rod and Jan's stay in the Grampians, these Cicadas have started to emerge, climb eucalypts right up to the flowers and sing loudly - they have been awake and singing at 8am each day and have continued until 8pm, although as the days have begun to warm up as well as lengthen, they anticipated an earlier start and a later finish to their serenade!
The one on the left emerged on the morning of 27/11 - the pupa must have escaped from the soil under the cover of darkness and climbed the nearest vertical object, the fence-post. By the time Rod and Jan noticed it, the adult had emerged fully and was resting, still holding onto its pupa-case, while its wings hardened, then it climbed to the top of the fence & eventually flew off to one of the flowering eucalypts nearby. Each day, more emerged to join in a chorus which became noticeably louder over time.
Magpies and Ravens have been alert to the possibilities of a free meal, of course, and are smart enough to catch newly emerged insects before they are able to fly.

The Orrs found several of these Blotched Sun-orchids, *Thelymitra benthamiana*, near the side of the Glenelg River Road but most of them had closed for the day. Rod delayed the closing of this one by placing his hot cup of tea near it while he got the camera gear ready. It worked.

A very unusual plant

This Namib Desert Treasure, *Welwitschia mirabiilis*, a primitive cone-bearer, which manages to grow in this desert (left picture) where no rain falls, just occasional mists from the sea (which is 100 or so km away). *Editor's note:* Anybody who has done a course in Botany will have come across the above picture when dealing with plant evolution. The photo in botany texts always looks like this, a tangled untidy mess. It looks messy because the plant only has two leaves which grow continuously and eventually get tattered by the desert wind (Photographer: Rod Orr). What you normally don't see in the botany texts is a close-up (see below) that shows the male (right) and female (left) cones.

Babiana curviscapa from Africa (photographer: Rod Orr). Is this one of those irises that have a hoverfly with an incredibly long proboscis as pollinators?
Left: *Psilotum* sp. from Central Australia (photographer: Katherine Legge)

Interesting forms of *Cheiranthera cyanea*
by Gemma Candy

This spring in the local bush has been wonderful for Blue Finger Flowers (*Cheiranthera cyanea*), as pointed out by Sabine Wilkens (Editor's Note Vol. 34, No. 10, November 2013). In the 10 years that I have lived in Bendigo, I have not seen this species flowering in such abundance. Walking in the Bendigo Regional Park on the Robie Road section of the Leanganook Track (Great Dividing Trail) in Kangaroo Flat, I noticed a white form (which has since been eaten back to a stub, presumably by a wallaby). On the same walk, also just on the side of the track, there was a variegated form with white margins on pale blue petals. The flower colour does seem to vary quite a lot within the blue/purple range from my observations, but this is the first white (or variegated) flower I have seen. I'd be interested to know if others have seen anything similar.

Excursion report – Warby Ranges, Warby-Ovens National Park, 25-27 October 2013

By John Lindner

Introduction

I don't think I've been on such a good campout since the "old days". Oops, I should use that much abused term advisedly, since its meaning is rather loaded and even smacks of a kind of snobbery. So I will define my terms for those of you who weren't around during the said revered period.

"Old days" refers to the early 1980s when I was new to Bendigo, I knew zero about anything and every experience and insight was new and stimulating. And of course there was even another "old days" before then . . . that's another story.

"Good campout" refers to the fact that the whole time was pretty well packed with discovering and rediscovering new species of plants and birds as we walked slowly around the formed tracks and through the bush. It was "all stops out", "full on" and "all systems go".

It is wonderfully rewarding to find stands of impressive plants (for example, groups of sulphur yellow Tiger Orchids and venerable Grass Trees with huge flowering stalks), closely followed by observing nest-building at close range (for example, the Restless Flycatchers near the camp or the Western Gerygones at Black Spring) or egg incubation (for example, Willy Wagtail and Jacky Winter, see page 5).

What is the real value of seeing these enchanting things? Well it puts tense and anxious worldly things into some sort of perspective. Hey, it's not such a bad place after all. What does a White-winged Triller know about Labour versus Liberal or wars anywhere on the globe, as it blithely follows the dictates of evolution? What would you rather be, a careless Triller or a care-worn human. . . well, just for a short time?

And the whole thing is improved because you actually live on site for a day or so, not the usual fleeting visit. It makes being a field naturalist really worthwhile. You can go home feeling complete somehow.

Oh, I nearly forgot, we actually did talk to each other about a whole range of other topics, so we're not complete nutters about nature.

For our first large campout in something like 20 years, this was a real beauty. So if you get the idea, make sure you come on the next one, scheduled for about the same time in 2014 and probably in the Killawarra Forest to the north of the Warbys.

Campsite Wenhams Camp, in a sheltered grassy valley, formerly grazed, at the southern end of the range. This area, with its diverse eucalypts and other flora, numerous birds (some of which were nesting close by) and little creek flowing from the granite, was an absolute gem.

Weather: Quite cold at night, but becoming warm and sunny during the day, especially Sunday.

Participants: Rob and Glenise Moors, Di and Graham Hill, Rod and Jan Orr, John Lindner, Kate Lindner, Pam Sheean, Kerrie Norris, Anne Bridley, Matt Comer, Richard Goonan and Gemma Candy and their little daughters Neri and Athene. Total of 16.

Pat and Mary Ward from Peechelba, uncle and aunt of Richard and Ben Goonan, joined us on Saturday and Sunday and were wonderfully helpful in guiding us around. Jeremy Perez, a young Frenchman visiting Australia for a year, joined us for the weekend too.

Program: Friday - Explore the Friends' Walk, of which we did half with a short cut back to camp (3.2 km).

Saturday - Complete the whole of the Friends Walk, along with short side trips to Jubilee Falls in Brien's Gorge and Kwat Kwat Look-out, and returning over Mount Warby (6.6 k).

Sunday - Walk around Black Spring (about 3 km) and Pine Gully Nature Walk (another 3 km approx.) On each of these walks we examined and tried to identify the various trees, shrubs and wildflowers, did some great birdwatching (including observing birds building and sitting on nests) and made our way over the interesting granite terrain with its characteristic rounded landforms, which here and there held small creeks of clear flowing water.

Notable plants

The signature plant of the Warbys is undoubtedly the impressive Grey Grass Tree. Most of them are quite tall, representing great age due to extremely slow growth. They have not been subjected to fire because their "skirts" of dead leaves are very long, often right to the ground. It is an oft repeated myth that these grass trees need to have fire to induce flowering, but this is definitely not the case. Many of the plants at Wenhams bore huge, robust flower spikes, up to two metres tall. The spikes bear thousands of tiny creamy flowers, those at the bottom often being dry and "finished" while those at the top still exuded nectar and attracted various insects. I reckon the tallest plant we measured (in two metres chunks, the height of an adult) was about 5 metres, 3 metres for the trunk and 2 metres for the spike. Many Grass Trees have 2 or 3 branches and all of these could carry a flowering spike. Pat said this was due to the very good winter rains. And for a plant that internally is very dry, and has only a core of spongy fibrous matter inside a "trunk" formed of the tightly packed leaf bases, it certainly would need plenty of moisture to make that juicy, brittle stalk. Several Grass trees had fallen over at some time but had continued to grow in a recumbent position, and then sent up vertical flower stalks despite their disability.

Among the Acacias, interesting species were Spurwing Wattle, with its stiff, curved phyllodes, forming dense bushes and patches (it had unfortunately finished flowering); Box-leaf Wattle with its rather nondescript phyllodes; and Red-stem Wattle with its intriguing foliage of both juvenile feathery leaves and large, curved adult phyllodes.

Among the Orchids, the bright yellow Tiger Orchid stood out in large groups, but Hooded Caladenias and Greencomb Spider-orchids were also present.

Other colourful wildflowers included Bluebells, Bulbine Lily, Sticky Everlasting, various Guinea-flowers, Austral Bugle and some peas.

Please refer to full list below, which has been checked by Rod Orr.

Notable birds

Not far from the camp, a Willy Wagtail pair was sitting on eggs and a Restless Flycatcher Pair was nest building close by. At Black Spring, Western Gerygones were nest building and a Brown Flycatcher (Jacky Winter) was sitting on a nest. Other very attractive birds were the

White-winged Triller (hyperactive and very vocal males, some chasing females), Turquoise Parrot (feeding on Cape Weed stems in the carpark at camp, and inspecting hollows at Black Spring), Noisy Friarbird (feeding on nectar in the mornings at the camp), Rufous Whistler (seemed to be ubiquitous and certainly full of song) . . . and many more (see Anne Bridley's list below).

Mammals

Eastern Grey Kangaroos grazed in the open grassland, especially in the mornings. There was at least one huge male, with several females and joeys at foot. Ringtail Possums were observed while spotlighting, and at Black Spring two animals were seen in broad daylight on a branch well away from a nearby hollow, to which they eventually returned. A Brushtail Possum was heard growling at night, as was a Koala. A large Wombat burrow, excavated in the sandy creek valley, was seen at Black Spring. Jeremy saw a young fox.

Warby Range plant List (compiled by John Lindner and checked by Rod Orr)

Wenham's Campsite and surrounds, Black Spring, Pine Gully walk 25 – 27 Oct 2013

F = flowering

Eucalypts

Eucalyptus goniocalyx	Long-leaf Box
Euc. nortonii	Mealy Bundy
Euc. macrorhyncha	Red Stringybark
Euc. blakelyi	Blakely's Red Gum (F)
Euc. melliodora	Yellow Box
Euc. polyanthemos	Red Box

Other trees

Allocasuarina verticillata	Drooping Sheoak

Acacias

Acacia implexa	Lightwood	
Ac. rubida	Red-stem Wattle	
Ac. buxifolia	Box-leaf Wattle	
Ac. dealbata	Silver Wattle	
Ac. verniciflua	Varnish Wattle	
Ac. triptera	Spurwing Wattle	

Grasstree

Xanthorrhoea glauca	Grey Grass Tree	(F)

Other small shrubs

Brachyloma daphnoides	Daphne Heath	(F)
Calytrix tetragona	Common Fringe-myrtle	
Dillwynia sericea	Silky Parrot-pea	F
Dodonaea viscosa ssp *angustissima*	Narrow-leaf Hop-bush	
Grevillea alpina	Alpine Grevillea	F
Hardenbergia violacea	Purple Coral-pea	
Hibbertia obtusifolia	Blunt-leaf (Grey) Guinea-flower	F
Hibbertia sericea	Silky Guinea-flower	F
Pultenaea platyphylla	Flat-leaf Bush-pea	
Pultenaea pedunculata	Matted Bush-pea	F

Small herbs, tuft plants and grasses

Ajuga australis	Austral Bugle	F
Arthropodium minus	Vanilla Lily	F
Bulbine bulbosa	Bulbine Lily	F
Burchardia umbellata	Milkmaids	F
Carex apressa	Tall Sedge	
Cheilanthes austrotenuifolia	Rock Fern	
Daucus glochidiatus	Austral Carrot	F
Dianella admixta	Black-anther Flax-lily	
Drosera peltata	Pale Sundew	F
Hydrocotyle laxiflora	Stinking Pennywort	F
Isotoma fluviatilis	Swamp Isotome	F
Isotoma axillaris	Rock Isotome	F
Stypandra glauca	Nodding Blue-lily	F
Triptilodiscus pygmaeus	Pygmy Sunray	F
Wahlenbergia stricta	Tall Bluebell	F
Wahlenbergia gracilis	Graceful Bluebell	F

Orchids

Caladenia tentaculata	Spider Orchid	F
Caladenia cucullata	Hooded Caladenia	F
Calochilus robersonii	Purplish Beard-orchid	F
Diuris sulphurea	Tiger Orchid	F
Microtis sp.	Onion Orchid	F

Daisies

Chrysocephalum apiculatum	Common Everlasting	F
Craspedia sp.	Billybuttons	F
Microseris aff *lanceolata*	Yam Daisy	F
Senecio sp	Fireweed	
Xerochrysum viscosa	Sticky Everlasting	F

Water plants

Triglochin procera	Water Ribbons

Weeds

Anagallis arvensis	Scarlet Pimpernel	F
Arctotheca calendula	Cape Weed	F
Bellardia trixago	Bellardia	F
Echium vulgare	Paterson's Curse	F
Hypericum perfoliatum	St. John's Wort	
Linaria pellisseriana	Little Linaria	F
Parentucelia latifolia	Common Bartsia	F
Petrahargia velutina	Smooth Pink	F
Salene gallica	French Catchfly	F
Taraxacum sp	Dandelion	F
Tolpis barbata	Yellow Hawkweed	F

Fauna observed by Anne Bridley

(with the editor's apologies for the 'compressed' nature of this information)

Little Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Common Bronzewing, Peaceful Dove, Gang-gang Cockatoo, Galah, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Musk Lorikeet, Eastern Rosella, Turquoise Parrot (in hollows), Pallid Cuckoo, Shining Bronze-cuckoo, Australian Owlet-nightjar, Spotted Quail-thrush, Laughing Kookaburra, Sacred Kingfisher, Rainbow Bee-eater, White-throated Treecreeper, Brown Treecreeper, Superb Fairy-wren, Spotted Pardalote, Striated Pardalote, Speckled Warbler, Weebill (nest), Western Gerygone (building nest), White-throated Gerygone, Brown Thornbill, Buff-rumped Thornbill, Yellow Thornbill, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Striated Thornbill (nest), Red Wattlebird, Noisy Friarbird, Yellow-tufted Honeyeater, Fuscous Honeyeater, White-plumed Honeyeater, Brown-headed Honeyeater, Jacky Winter, Scarlet Robin, Red-capped Robin, Hooded Robin, Eastern Yellow Robin, White-browed Babbler, Varied Sittella, Crested Shrike-tit, Golden Whistler, Rufous Whistler, Grey Shrike-

thrush, Leaden Flycatcher, Restless Flycatcher (building nest), Grey Fantail, Willie Wagtail (sitting on nest), Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike, White-winged Triller, Olive-backed Oriole, White-browed Woodswallow, Dusky Woodswallow, Australian Magpie, Pied Currawong Australian Raven, White-winged Chough, Red-browed Finch, Mistletoebird, Silvereye,

Common Wombat (droppings, den), Koala (heard), Common Brushtail Possum (heard), Sugar Glider (heard), Common Ringtail Possum, Eastern Grey Kangaroo, Black Wallaby, Banjo Frog (heard), Spotted Marsh Frog (heard), Common Froglet (heard)

Diary

All Club meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High St Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

Wednesday December 11 6.30pm
For the December meeting, we usually share a meal (hence the earlier starting time). Everyone is welcome to contribute something. Please also bring your own good cheer, drinks and utensils.

Wednesday February 12, 2014 **7.30pm**

Family Nature Club
The Nature Club activities will resume in 2014, please listen out for announcements or check out their website.
Registration:
Bendigonatureclub@gmail.com or 5443-1326
http://bendigofamilynatureclub.blogspot.com/

Bendigo Native Plant Group meeting.
All interested people are welcome to come along. Meeting starts at 7:30pm on the third Tuesday of the month, Golden Square Senior Citizens Hall.
Next meeting: 17th of December.

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.
W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

Melbourne's Monthly Flying Fox Count
At Yarra Bend Park, the bat count is held once a month at dusk when the whole colony of 10,000 -20,000 bats fly out to feed around Melbourne's suburbs. New counters are very welcome... 11 Dec 2013 8:15pm-9:15pm
Booking required. Contact Dr Rodney van der Ree on 0412 562429 or rvdr@unimelb.edu.au

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Photography workshop with Geoff Park and Chris Tzaros (by Geoff Park)

Chris Tzaros and I will be hosting two bird photography workshops next month, on Saturday 7th December and Sunday 8th December (2.30 - 7.30pm), in Newstead. Each workshop is limited to 10 participants at a cost of $100. Please email me, geoff.park@naturaldecisions.com.au to book a place in one of these highly regarded workshops - please indicate your preferred date. The workshops follow from our first successful outing, held earlier this year. The feedback from participants on that occasion was very positive and encouraging ... so here we go again! We've adjusted the format a little this time around. Each session will commence with an hour-long illustrated talk, 'Bird Photography: Tips & Techniques', followed by a field session in the local bush. The workshop will conclude back indoors where participants can share their images, receive constructive critique on improving their field craft and discuss image capture and post-processing techniques.

If December doesn't suit and you'd like to be added to our mailing list for future events, please let me know.